

Owl School

By

Nicole Gianuca

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nwgianuca@gmail.com

INT LIVING ROOM - DAY

The living room, which is comfortably sized and decorated, is filled with people. They range from middle aged to elderly, with a few children sitting on the stairs eating little cakes. All are dressed in black or greys. Small groups of adults hold coffee mugs and stand together, talking quietly. EMILY, a young lady in her early 20s, dressed in tailored black skirt and black blouse, sits motionless on a couch in the middle of the room, alone. Her face is expressionless. She is watching a slideshow on a TV of an older middle aged man who looks a lot like her. It contains several photos and short video clips of him. We see an old photo of him with his arms around two small elementary aged girls. We see a short clip of him winking at the camera like a movie star, then laughing. We see a photo of him and his wife feeding each other wedding cake. We see a picture of him holding a baby girl. Then we see a short clip of him, tucking the older girl from the first picture into bed. He turns on a lamp that sits on her bedside table and tiny owls are projected onto the walls. He kisses her on the forehead. Emily continues to stare at the screen.

One after another, Emily's relatives come sit next to her and talk to her as she remains seated, expressionless, staring at the slide show. Her aunt Prudence sits close to her with a pitying look.

AUNT PRUDENCE

You poor thing. I can't imagine how you must feel.

She pats Emily's hand but Emily doesn't respond. Uncle Bill, a rather large relative, sits next to her as soon as Aunt Prudence leaves.

UNCLE BILL

How are you holdin' up kiddo?

Emily doesn't say anything. He turns his eyes to the slideshow for a moment, watching with her, then looks back to Emily. He lets out a big sigh and pats her on the leg affectionately.

UNCLE BILL

Ah well... We'll catch up some other time.

He struggles for a moment, getting to his feet. Emily is left alone again.

INT. BEDROOM - SUNSET

Emily closes the door to the room and takes a deep breath. She's finally alone. She crosses to a big window that sits above a fluffy window seat. Kneeling on the seat, she opens the windows and leans out, looking into the sky. It's coloured with purples, pinks and oranges as the sun approaches the trees that mark the horizon. Their tops are covered in snow.

Leaving the window open, Emily turns back into the room and wanders across to a shelf that sits above her bed. A tight line of stuffed toy owls of all different kinds sits on it. She fixes one or two that have fallen. There is an old notebook sitting underneath a few of them. She pulls it out. It looks like it's seen a few years. Emily plops down on her bed with it and picks up an old brown toy owl that is laying on the pillow. She grooms him for a moment, then places him in her lap and opens the notebook. Inside are the coloured pencil illustrations of a young child. The title page reads: Owl School, with a small happy owl drawn beneath. Next is a picture of her and a brown owl, just like the toy in her lap. It's labelled "Me" and "Mr Owl." The next drawing, she is on the back of the brown owl as it flies above a house (her own.) A man stands in the yard waving, labelled "Dad." The next drawing is of her flying on "Mr. Owl" as "Dad" rides on another owl. The last illustration is of her, "Mr. Owl" and "Dad" sitting on the top of a tree while looking at a star filled sky.

Emily closes the book and puts it on the bedside table. She looks at the lamp for a moment, then tries to flick it on a few times. It doesn't work. She lays down and she hugs the toy as she slowly falls asleep.

INT. BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

Emily wakes up in a dark room, only lit by the moon from the window. She shivers violently, teeth almost clattering. She forgot to close the window! Groaning, she swings her feet out of bed to close the window. She stops and furrows her brow. Sitting on her window seat is a giant brown owl, so big that she could climb aboard and ride him. His huge eyes are fixed on Emily, observing. Emily just stares back. Is she dreaming?

Suddenly, it takes a small leap and flaps to the foot of her bed. Emily jumps back, pulling the sheets up to her chin in one motion. The brown owl collects itself and resumes it's stare. She loosens her grip on the sheets and sits forward, still watching the owl closely. It winks. Emily giggles despite herself. After a moment, she reaches out. She stops

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just before the owl's face. It stares, then nuzzles her hand. She giggles again.

The owl leaps again to the window seat, sending Emily back under the sheets. The owl stares at her. She just stares back. He ruffles his feathers and hoots impatiently. Finally, Emily rises and approaches him. As she gets close, he spreads his wings and turns his head to continue eye contact. She touches his shoulder and hesitates. Then she climbs onto his back. The owl hoots again in approval. Emily's eyes go wide and she tightly hugs the owl. They dive off the window, into the dark sky.

EXT. EMILY'S NEIGHBORHOOD - LATE NIGHT

Emily and the owl fly high above her house and the winter landscape. The houses look like tiny models, the cars look like toys. She raises her face to the wind, inhaling with a big smile. They soar over snow covered tree tops.

EXT. FORREST - LATE NIGHT

The owl approaches one tree top that pokes out just above the rest. They have flown quite a ways, so the trees are thick. The owl lands and gently lowers Emily onto a thick branch. She stands, half hugging the trunk, half hanging into the wind. She stares into the star filled sky, unaffected by city lights. She watches her breath rise up into the sky like smoke. The owl looks at her, then into the sky as well. She smiles and shivers.

INT. BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

The sky is just beginning to turn light again, when the owl arrives on Emily's window seat with her on his back. He flaps to the floor and she hugs his back before softly climbing off. She seems to have a permanent half smile on her face as she walks across to her bed and sits in it. The owl flaps onto the foot of her bed. She smiles at him, then begins to pull the covers up. The owl reaches down with his beak and helps pull the sheets up, tucking her in. He is gentle, as if he were handling his own young. Then... he reaches across and flicks on the bedside light with his beak. It flickers, then begins to rotate, sending tiny owls into flight on the walls. She stares at him in astonishment. The owl slowly winks again. Emily's eyes fill. She hugs him long and hard, then wipes her eyes as she climbs back under the covers. She looks at the owl as he sits on the foot of her bed and smiles, then falls asleep. The owl closes his eyes too.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Emily awakes refreshed, and after a moment recalls her adventure. She looks towards the now closed windows and smiles. The sunshine streams through.

V.O. MOM

Emily! Breakfast! Come on down!

Emily bursts into a genuine smile, the biggest smile she's had in a while.

EMILY

Coming!

She swings her feet out of bed with enthusiasm. As she heads out the door, we see the window and window seat full of light. As we get closer we see, there on the seat, a long brown feather shimmering in the light.